

Searching for the Spirit of the Sages:

*Baisaô and Sencha in Japan*¹

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Sencha 煎茶 (green leaf tea) today serves as the focus of a relatively obscure tea ceremony in Japan. Yet in the *bakumatsu* and early Meiji eras, its popularity eclipsed that of *chanoyu* 茶の湯. Initial interest in *sencha*, first cultivated in the 1730s, was due to its delicate flavor and relative ease of preparation, which required neither an elaborate ritual nor expensive utensils. Moreover, its esteem resulted from associations with China's sophisticated culture, knowledge of which had long been a marker of elite status in Japan. Earlier, this knowledge had been the exclusive domain of the highest levels of Japanese society. By the early 18th century, educated Japanese from all walks of life had appropriated its values and material culture to demonstrate their cultivation and improve their social standing.² The continuation of the tradition today reveals the persistence, though in diminished importance, of Chinese-influenced learning and avocations in modern Japanese society: approximately one hundred separate schools of *senchadô* 煎茶道 are in existence, located in most major Japanese cities. My intention here, though, is to focus on its florescence in the early modern era, when *sencha* both reflected and facilitated the permeation into Japanese society of Chinese ideals and aesthetics.

Kô Yugai 高遊外 (1675-1763), popularly known as Baisaô 賣茶翁 (the old tea seller), is considered the patriarch of the *sencha* tea ceremony. He idolized Lu Yu 陸羽 (J. Riku U, d. 804), the author of the *Classic of Tea* (Ch. *Chajing* 茶經; J. *Chakyo*),³ China's first tea treatise, and other ancient Chinese sages, whose fondness for tea stemmed from their belief in its ability to facilitate enlightenment. Yet Baisaô could not have attracted as large and as loyal a following for his tea had not existing conditions predisposed the public for its acceptance. While Baisaô's charismatic personality did thrust *sencha* into the Kyoto limelight, others spread its ideology and helped create a national appeal.

By the time Baisaô appeared on the scene in the first half of the 18th century, all elements necessary to the formation of a cult for *sencha* existed. There was increased

¹ This article is an annotated version of the paper that was presented at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting in Honolulu, April, 1996. It introduces some of the ideas I deal with in more detailed form in my forthcoming book, *Sencha, Tea of the Sages*. That study traces the history Japanese appreciation for material culture of the Chinese literati as it relates to the *sencha* tea ceremony in Japan from its inception to the present.

² Similar considerations have been attributed to the development of modes of consumption in Western societies. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), especially pp. 76-77.

³ For an English translation, see Francis Ross Carpenter, *The Classic of Tea* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1974).

understanding of Chinese cultural traditions, with Chinese learning promoted as the basis for education among all classes of society. Through renewed trade, Chinese books were widely accessible. Among these, many outlined the basics of literati life, and so included information on the steeping of green leaf tea (Ch. *jiancha*), a favorite drink of the literati. Through these books, Japanese readers learned of the intellectual and aesthetic environment in which to enjoy *sencha*. Although Japanese could not travel abroad, they were familiar with Chinese customs, including *jiancha*, from contacts with immigrant Chinese Ming loyalists, Ôbaku 黄檗 monks, as well as from literate Chinese merchants in Nagasaki. From these sources, as well as from popular printed books, they learned of Chinese customs and architectural design. Newly imported Chinese luxury products were also available for purchase in major markets: initially, they were mainly used as *chanoyu* utensils and adornments for display in *tokonoma* 床の間 of elite consumers; later, they became daily utensils and accoutrements for *sencha*.

By Baisaô's time, Confucian scholars had developed new ideologies, such as Kogaku 古學, which promoted China's ancient sages, self-cultivation, the merits of appreciating literature, and expressions of individuality. These ideas exerted especially strong influence in Kyoto in Baisaô's day. Tea drinking itself also was undergoing radical transformation following the death of Sen no Rikyû 千利休 (1522-1591). Chinese steeped tea was known in Japan from the late 16th century and by 1658, it was being sold by peddlers in Edo. The book *Honchô shokukan* 本朝食鑑 (Compendium of Food from Our Time), published in 1692, informs us that among the women of that city, it was common to drink a number of cups of *sencha* before breakfast. Contemporary scholars assume this was something like ordinary *ocha* お茶 or *bancha* 番茶, the lowest grade of green leaf tea in Japan.⁴ From the early 18th century, this tea was popularly called "Ingen cha" 隠元茶 (Ingen's tea), named for the founder of Ôbaku Zen whose adherents drank *sencha* rather than the *matcha* 抹茶 preferred by the older Zen sects.⁵

Concurrently, there was growing dissension among followers of *chanoyu*: tensions between priest-practitioners and secular masters, and criticisms of *chanoyu*. The Kogaku scholar Dazai Shundai 太宰春臺 (1680-1747), for example, wrote scathing comments about *chanoyu* in his 1738 text, *Dokugo* 獨語 (Soliloquy). His remarks are simultaneously politically elitist and aesthetically dismissive. On the one hand, he considered *chanoyu* a threat to the social order imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate. He felt it encouraged denial of distinctions among the classes in its celebration of poverty in both the aesthetics of the accoutrements and the design of the tearoom, and he objected to the practice of inviting commoners to tea gatherings together with samurai. On the other

⁴ Kadoyama Shigeru 角山栄, *Nihon no ocha* 日本のお茶 (Tea of Japan), vol. 3, *Ocha to bunka* お茶と文化 (Tea and Culture) (Tokyo: Gyôsei Publishers, 1988), p. 23; and Nishiyama Matsunosuke 西山松之助, et al., eds. *Edogaku jiten* 江戸学辞典 (Dictionary of Edo learning) (Tokyo: Kôbundô, 1984), p. 283.

⁵ The samurai Morikawa Kyoroku 森川許六 (1656-1715), a *haiku* poet and disciple of Bashô, mentioned "Ingen tea" in his *Fûzoku monzen* 風俗文選 (Anthology of Customs) of 1706, a collection of *haiku* prose of the Bashô school. This reference was provided by Ôtsuki Mikio 大槻幹郎 of the Bunkaden 文化殿 at Manpukuji. For discussion of this book in English, see Donald Keene, *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600-1867* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1976), pp. 142-143.

hand, Shundai decried *chanoyu* gatherings as pretentious, its utensils as filthy and overpriced, the custom of crawling through a low door as insulting, and the tearoom atmosphere dark and suffocating.⁶

Contemporary Chinese elements also made incursions into *wabi* aesthetics, both in the choice of accoutrements and in discussions of Chinese tea culture in texts by such authors as Mitani Nariyasu 三谷良朴 (1665-1741) and Yabunouchi Chikushin 藪内竹心 (1678-1745). Mitani Nariyasu's 1728 text, *Wa-Kan chashi* 和漢茶誌 (Records of Chinese and Japanese Tea), was the first Japanese tea book to embrace both Chinese and Japanese tea history as a single continuum. Yabunouchi Chikushin's treatise, *Genryû chawa* 源流茶話 (Talks on the Origin of Tea), published in 1745, elevated above all else the contribution of the Chinese literati to the formation of the cult of tea.⁷

In order to develop as a formidable tea tradition, *sencha* needed a definitive aesthetic and spiritual identity of its own. Its followers found this in idealization of the literati lifestyle of such 17th century men as the samurai-recluse of Kyoto, Ishikawa Jôzan 石川丈山 (1583-1672), known as the first Japanese to assimilate Chinese literati values while sequestered in his Shisendô 詩仙堂 hermitage, a *sukiya shoin* 數寄屋書院 building embellished with elements of Chinese design. Later writers indicated that Jôzan epitomized the essence of *fûryû* 風流 (elegance), a word of many nuances, which in this case referred to his pure and unassuming spirit, and immersion in Chinese literati pursuits—composing calligraphy and poetry, and possibly, drinking *sencha*.⁸ *Fûryû* came to define *sencha* aesthetics, and Jôzan's retreat and pastimes became models for the appearance and ambience of *sencha* gatherings.

Sencha also required a claim to an established source of moral authority, and this was provided by the *sencha*-drinking Chinese Ôbaku Zen monks. Renowned for their deep knowledge of Chinese philosophy, their temples had a dignified Chinese appearance as well. Reverence for these monks in elite political circles provided *sencha* with the necessary standing to compete with *chanoyu*, associated with rival Rinzaï Zen.

The final step necessary to the formation of a cult for *sencha* was for someone to promote it as an alternative avocation to *chanoyu* and this was accomplished by Baisaô (plate 1). Raised in an Ôbaku temple in Kyushu, Baisaô visited Nagasaki where it assumed that he learned how to prepare *sencha* properly. Later, he left the priesthood and lived in impoverishment, selling *sencha* in Kyoto from around 1735, from a portable stall he carried on his back, named "Senka" 仙窠 (den of the sages). Gregarious and eccentric, Baisaô was respected as an eloquent *Kanshi* 漢詩 poet and as a first-rate calligrapher. He claimed to be neither Buddhist, Confucian, nor Daoist, but his untrammled philosophizing was obviously indebted to the reclusive and heterodox ideals found within

⁶ Paul Varley, "Chanoyu from Genroku to Modern Times," in *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu*, ed. Paul Varley and Kumakura Isao (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 174-76.

⁷ For a discussion of these issues see: Robert Walter Kramer, "The Tea Cult in History," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985, pp. 66-69.

⁸ For a discussion of *fûryû* in Jôzan and Bashô's art, see J. Thomas Rimer, "Ishikawa Jôzan," in *Shisendô: Hall of the Poetry Immortals*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer, et al. (New York: Weatherhill, 1991), pp. 22-24.

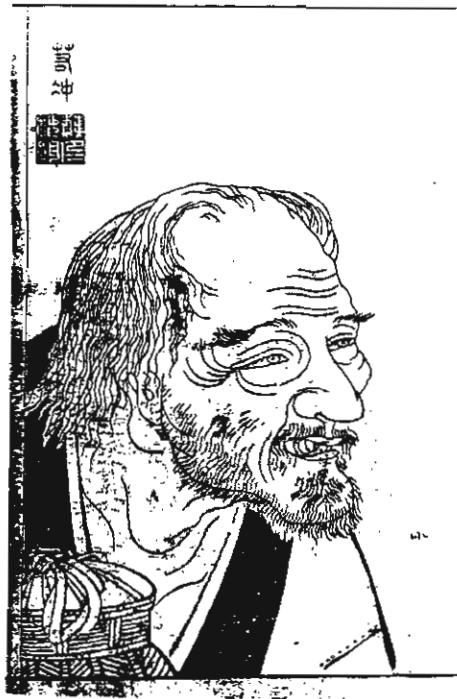


Plate 1. Itô Jakuchû (1716-1800), *Portrait of Baisaô*, frontispiece to the *Baisaô gego* (Verses of the Old Tea Seller). Tokyo National Museum collection. Photo after: Money L. Hickman and Yasuhiro Satô, *The Paintings of Jakuchû* (New York: The Asia Society, 1989), plate 19.

all these ideologies. His ideals and asceticism served as inspiration for those seeking solace from Japan's hierarchical and increasingly materialistic society. In their preference for *sencha*, Baisaô's followers were provided with a means of obliquely criticizing the bakufu regime which had made *chanoyu* into required protocol. Friends and admirers included Kyoto's *bunjin*--painters, poets, priests, and Confucian scholars--many with ties to the Confucian academy of Ogyû Sorai 荻生徂徠.⁹

Baisaô gained fame as one of Kyoto's *kijin* 畸人, a person whose precocity, strangeness, intellectual ability, or perceived spirituality set him apart from the common folk and made him worthy of admiration. Many of his poems, collected and published in the books, *Baisanshû chafu ryaku* 梅山種茶譜略 (Summary of the Plum Mountain Collection of Records about Tea) of 1748 and *Baisaô gego* 賣茶翁偈語 (Verses of the Old Tea Seller) of 1763, describe his difficult circumstances, but some, like the following, convey the essence of what he was really propagating in the guise of tea.

⁹ Prominent friends included the Confucian scholar Uno Meika 宇野明霞 (1698-1745), the Tendai priests and kanshi poets Kinryû Dôjin 金龍道人 (1712-82) and Rikunyo 六如 (1737-1803), the eccentric painter Itô Jakuchû 伊藤若冲 (1716-1800), the Shôkokuji priest Daiten Kenjô 大典顯常 (1719-1801), the *Kanshi* poet and Confucian scholar Katayama Hokkai 片山北海 (1723-90), the Nanga painter Ike Taiga 池大雅 (1723-76), and the bibliophile sake brewer Kimura Kenkadô 木村蒹葭堂 (1736-1802).

Setting up Shop at the Rengeô-in [Sanjûsangendô]

This place of mine, so poor,
 I'm often even out of water;
 But I offer you an elixir
 That changes your very marrow.
 You'll find me in the pines,
 By the Hall of a Thousand Buddhas,
 Come take a drink -- who knows?
 You may reach Sagehood yourself.¹⁰

In 1755, suffering from the infirmities of old age, Baisaô stopped selling tea and burned many of his utensils, as he did not wish for them to become treasured objects like *chanoyu* accoutrements. However, he bestowed some upon his friends, and many were sketched by his admirer Kimura Kenkadô, who spearheaded the movement to exalt him as a cult hero after his death. Kenkadô's sketch album of Baisaô's utensils, *Baisaô chagu zu* 賣茶翁茶具圖 (pictures of Baisaô's tea utensils),¹¹ was later published posthumously by his son in 1823 where his illustrations were copied by Kenkadô's friend, the Nanga painter Aoki Shukuya 青木夙夜 (ca. 1737-1802) in the accordion-folded book *Baisaô chaki zufu* 賣茶翁茶器圖譜 (Pictorial Record of Baisaô's Tea Implements) (plate 2).

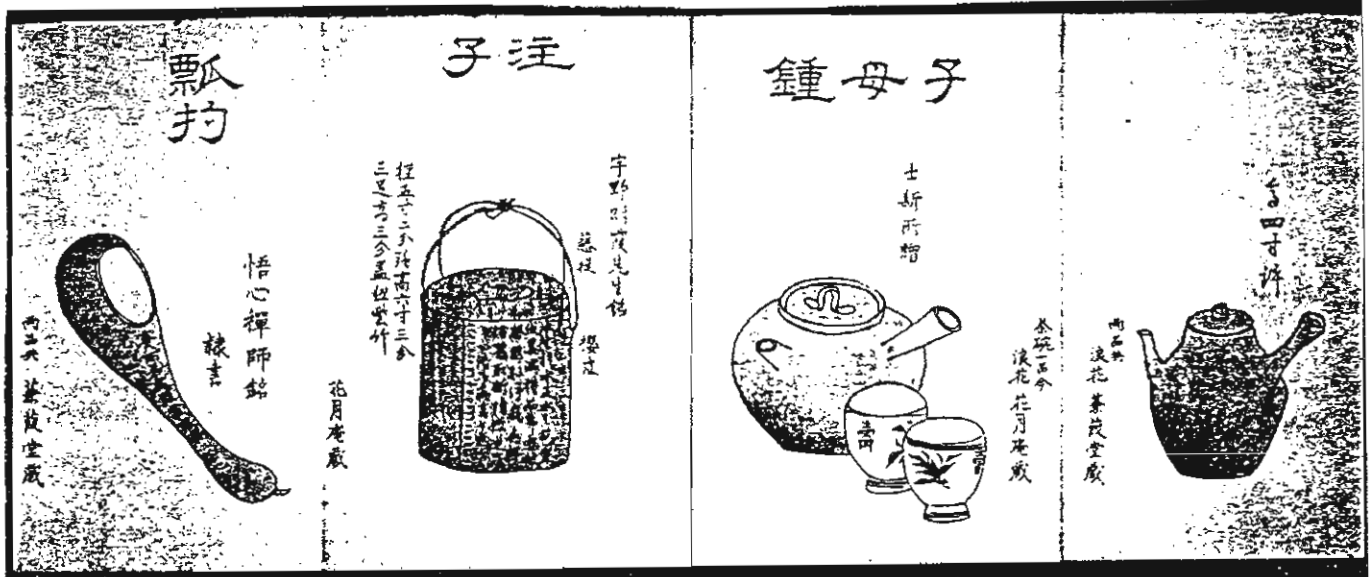


Plate 2. Aoki Shukuya (ca. 1737-1802), section of the *Baisaô chaki zufu* (Pictorial Record of Baisaô's Tea Implements), 1823. Accordion-folded album, woodblock print in ink, and light colors on paper. Private collection, Japan

¹⁰ Included in the *Baisaô gego*, the translation of this poem is by Norman Waddell, in "The Old Tea Seller: The Life and Poetry of Baisaô," *The Eastern Buddhist*, new series, XVII.2 (Autumn 1984), pp. 105-106.

¹¹ This album is illustrated in color in Shufu no tomo sha 主婦の友社, ed. Baisaô shûsei 売茶翁集成 (Collected Records of Baisaô) (Tokyo: Shufu no tomo sha, 1975), pp. 9-11.

Thus, inadvertently, Baisaô's followers began the formalization process for a *sencha* tea ceremony as they all desired Chinese tea utensils similar to his. Consequently, these wares--underglaze blue porcelain teacups and unglazed southern Chinese "Nanban" 南蠻 stoneware kettles--began to be imported in greater quantities. By the 1790s, some Japanese craftsmen in Kyoto, beginning with Kiyomizu Rokubei I 清水六兵衛 (1733?-1799), had started copying the stoneware braziers and kettles, while others began devising new types of porcelain utensils for *sencha* in well-known Chinese styles--primarily *kinrande* 金襴手 (overglaze enamels with gold leaf), *shôzui* 祥瑞 (a type of underglaze blue ware), *kôchi* 交趾 (a type of yellow, purple, and green overglaze enameled wares from southern China), and celadon glazed wares. These wares had all previously been the favorites of the upper echelons of the samurai class who had considered the original Chinese wares as prized possessions and utilized them for *chanoyu*. The porcelain adaptations by Kyoto potters were initiated by Okuda Eisen 奥田穎川 (1753-1811) and his followers: Aoki Mokubei 清木木米 (1767-1833), Nin'ami Dôhachi 仁阿爾道八 (1783-1855), and others.

Baisaô's poetry had conveyed the essence of Chinese literati attitudes towards *sencha*, but did not describe the more practical matters of how *sencha* was to be prepared according to Chinese precedents nor of how the literati way of life he championed could be implemented in Japan. These issues were addressed by Baisaô's friends and followers, primarily Daiten Kenjô 大典顯常 and Kimura Kenkadô, who together published some of the first Japanese editions of Chinese books on tea and translations into Japanese of these for laymen who could not read the *Kanbun* originals.¹²

Another contemporary *sencha* fan, Ôeda Ryûhō 大枝流芳 (d. ca. 1756) of Osaka, was a wealthy merchant who had spent his youth in retirement outside Kyoto emulating Chinese literati life. He wrote the first practical guides to preparing *sencha* and following a literati lifestyle. Ryûhō also authored texts on shell-collecting, the incense ceremony and flower arranging in addition to *sencha* and literati culture in general, the latter being featured in his *Gayu manroku* 雅遊滿錄 (Miscellaneous Records of Elegant Pastimes) of 1762. This book was based on late Ming treatises on material culture and served as a guide to the correct selection and use of objects for elegant activities in which to engage while drinking *sencha*, advice carefully heeded by later followers of the cult (plate 3). Ryûhō elucidated his intentions with his statement that "one could behold the nature of a person's heart from the things they possess, and that looking at things which are vulgar (*zoku* 俗) and not elegant (*ga* 雅) is annoying."¹³ Ryûhō's *Seiwan chawa* 清灣茶話

¹² In 1764, they published a new edition of the Qing text, *Jiancha jue* 煎茶訣 (J. *Sencha ketsu*; secrets of steeped tea) by Ye Jun 葉蓊, based on a copy from Kenkadô's famous collection, and in 1774 their book, *Chakyô shôsetsu* (Detailed Explanation of the Tea Classic) became the first explication in Japanese of Lu Yu's treatise. For discussion of these and other pre-modern Chinese books on tea that have survived in various Chinese and Japanese editions, see Nunome Chôfû 布目潮風, ed., *Chûgoku chashô zenshû* 中国茶書全集 (Tokyo: Kyûko shoin, 1987), vol. 1.

¹³ This passage is from the introduction to the general section on scholars' utensils which is the first part of volume one. It is discussed in Takahashi Hiromi 高橋博巳, *Kyôto geien no nettowaku* 京都芸苑のネットワーク (Networks of Art and Literary Circles of Kyoto) (Tokyo: Pelican sha, 1988), pp. 160-61.

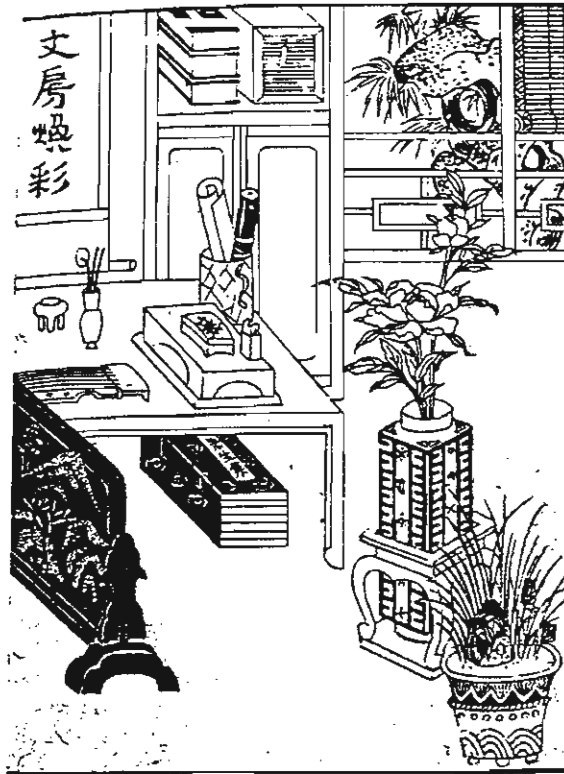


Plate 3. Ôeda Ryûhō (d. ca. 1756), *View of a Chinese Scholar's Study*, page from the woodblock printed book, *Gayû manroku* (Miscellaneous Records of Elegant Pastimes), 1762. Private collection, Japan

(Chats on Tea by the Azure Harbor) of 1756, was the first true treatise on *sencha* in Japan, but it was more philosophical than practical. It included a preface by the Osaka physician and writer of popular yomihon fiction, Tsuga Teishō 都賀庭鐘 (1718-c.1794), who stated that the book was necessitated by *sencha*'s rapid rise in popularity among a public who needed instruction in its spiritual basis.¹⁴

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, *sencha* gained wider popularity through the writings of the Osaka *kokugaku* 國學 (nativist) scholar, physician and writer, Ueda Akinari 上田秋成 (1734-1809), author of the *Seifû sagen* 清風瑣言 (Miscellaneous Comments on the Way of Pure Elegance) of 1794, and the *Chaka suigen* 茶癡醉言 (Drunken Words of a Tea Addict) of ca. 1807. To Akinari and later *kokugaku* scholars and others who were Imperial loyalists in the waning days of the Tokugawa hegemony, *sencha* represented a silent protest against official policy, even though its Chinese-derived values were ostensibly contrary to their creed. In his *Seifû sagen*, Akinari promoted the use of *Nanban* teapots like those owned by Baisaō which he illustrated in his *Seifû sagen* (plate 4). This book was also the first to define *sencha* as a

¹⁴ For information about Ryûhō and his relationship with Tsuga Teishō, see Nakamura Yukihiro 中村幸彦, *Kinsei sakka kenkyû* 近世作家研究 (Research on Writers of the Early Modern Era) (Tokyo: Sanichi shobō, 1961), pp. 153-57.

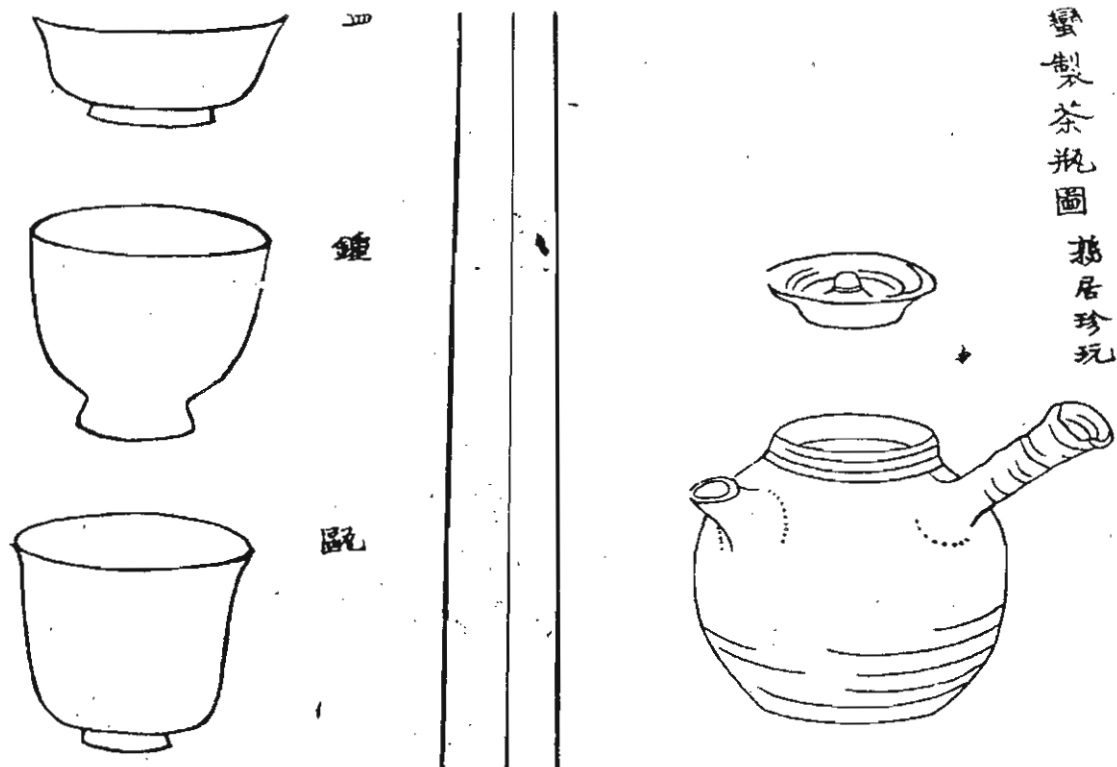


Plate 4. Ueda Akinari (1734-1809), *Teacups and a Nanban Style Teapot*, page from the woodblock printed book, *Seifū sagen* (Miscellaneous Comments on the Way of Pure Elegance), 1794. Private collection, Japan

rival and superior tea tradition to *chanoyu*.¹⁵ He wrote that *sencha* facilitated spiritual enlightenment while *chanoyu* had degenerated into little more than a complicated ritual with innumerable required rules. The author of its preface, the Sōrai school Confucian scholar Murase Kōtei 村瀬栲亭 (1746-1818), defined the differences between the two traditions with the succinct statement: “*chanoyu* is about knowledge, but *sencha* is about purity of spirit.”¹⁶

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, texts on *sencha* geared to a popular audience began outlining procedures, sometimes with familiar terms for utensils borrowed from *chanoyu*. One such book in which utensils are illustrated is the 1802 *Sencha hayashinan* 煎茶早指南 (Quick Guide to *Sencha*) (plate 5) by Ryūkatēi Ransui 柳下亭嵐翠 (active early nineteenth century). In contrast, *bunjin* 文人 writers on *sencha* continued to emphasize its integral place in their lifestyle. The 1828 book, *Ryōzandō chawa* 良山堂茶話 (Chats on Tea by Ryōzan), by Abe Kenshū 阿部絹洲 (Ryōzandō 良山堂, fl. first half of the nineteenth century), a disciple of the Confucian scholar and historian Rai San'yo 賴山陽 (1780-1832), first contained the term *bunjincha* 文人茶 (scholars' tea) which described the drinking of *sencha* as an adjunct to other literati activities. These took place in the intimate environment of private residences or at *shogakai* 書畫會 painting and calligraphy banquets), which were often held in elegant

¹⁵ For a short discussion of the *Seifū sagen* in English, see Blake Morgan Young, *Ueda Akinari* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), pp.108-109.

¹⁶ This passage is discussed in: Tsukuda Ikki 佃一輝, *Sencha no tabi: bunjin no sokusei o tazunete* 煎茶の旅、文人の促成を訪ねて (Travels with *Sencha*, in the Footsteps of the Literati) (Osaka: Ōsaka shoseki, 1985), pp. 166-67.

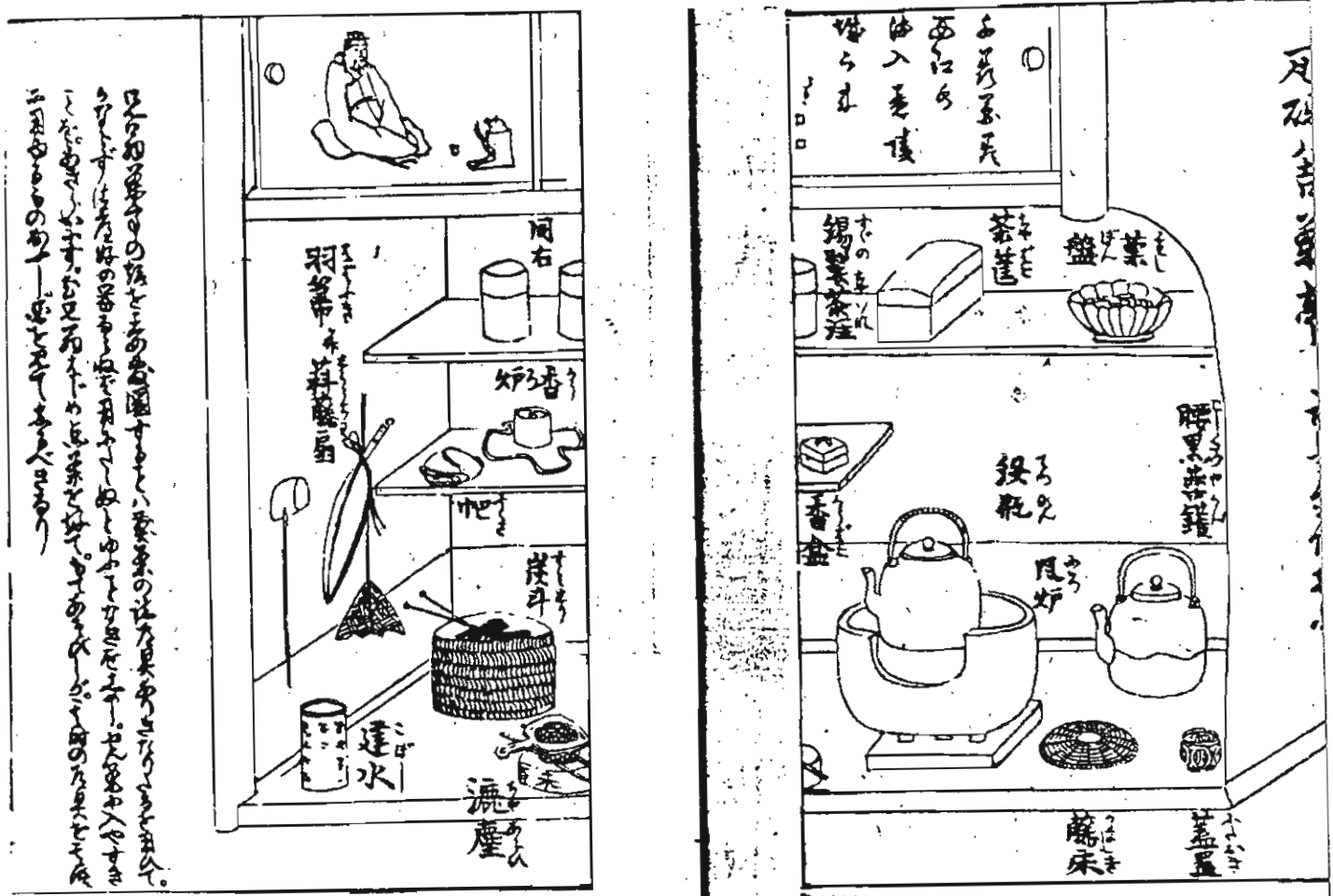


Plate 5. Ryūkatei Ransui (active early nineteenth century), *Sencha Utensils in a Storage Cabinet*, page from the woodblock book, *Sencha hayashinan* (Quick Guide to *sencha*), 1801. Private collection, Japan

villas (plate 6).¹⁷ Because most *bunjin* were connoisseurs of Chinese antiquities, *bunjincha* featured the use of Chinese utensils or their close copies. As the general public believed that participating in *bunjin* avocations such as *sencha* attested to one's sophistication, *sencha* grew in popularity, as did the utensils preferred by the *bunjin*, possessions which reflected their owners' discrimination.

In 1835, *sencha* surged in popularity when the manufacture of *gyokuro* 玉露, the finest grade of green leaf tea, was perfected. Preparation methods for *gyokuro* necessitated increased variety of utensils, and as one needed to use these utensils properly, people sought guidance on preparation techniques, as well as selection of utensils appropriate for particular occasions. Thus, popular pocket-sized guides, such as

¹⁷ For discussion of opulent *shogakai* in Edo, see Andrew Markus, "Shogakai: Celebrity Banquets of the Late Edo Period," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53.1 (1993), pp. 137, 146-47, 152-53.

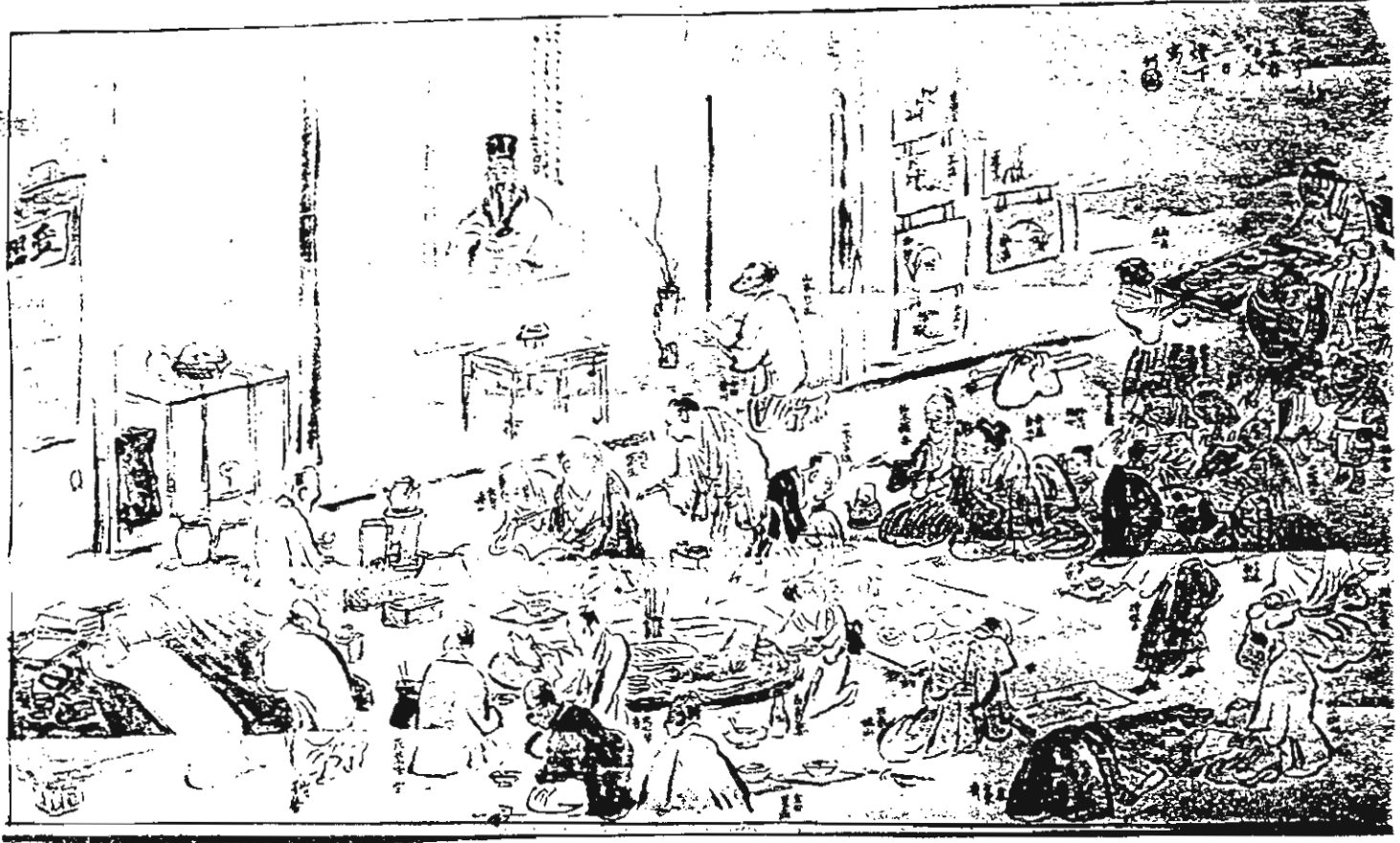


Plate 6. Tsubaki Chinzan 椿椿山 (1801-54), *Painting and Calligraphy Party (shogakai)*, 1840. Sketch mounted as a hanging scroll, ink on paper. Tawara-chô kyôiku iinkai (Tawara City Board of Education Office)

the 1848 *Sencha tebiki no shû* 煎茶手引の種 (Secret Guide to *Sencha*) which illustrated *kazari* 飾 (utensil arrangements), appeared (plate 7).

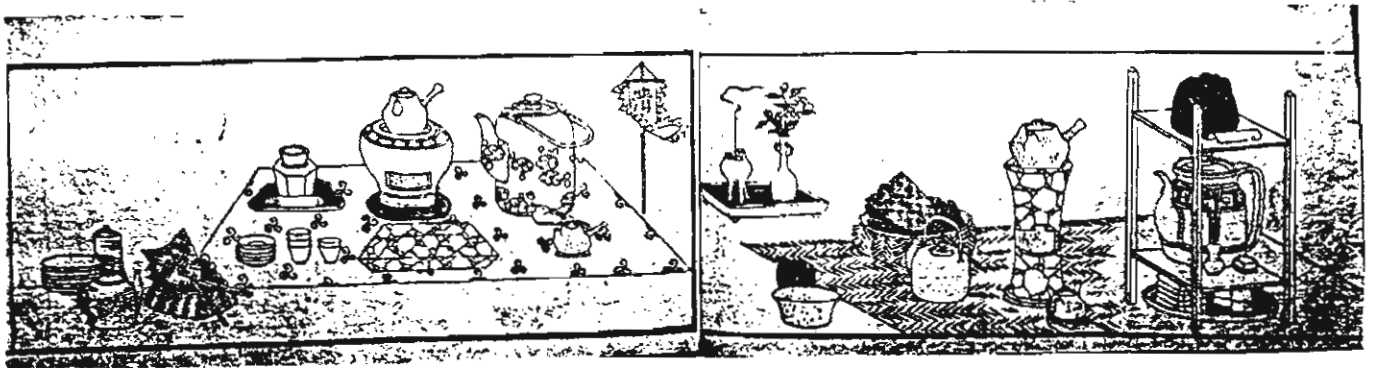


Plate 7. Katsushika Ôi 葛飾應為 (fl. second quarter, nineteenth century) *Arrangement for Sencha Utensils*, page from the book *Sencha tebiki no shû*, (Secret Guide to *Sencha*), by Yamamoto Tokujun 山本徳潤 (dates unknown), 1848. Private collection, Japan

Teachers, were also required because detailed preparation techniques were still secretly transmitted and not yet written about in the books. The founder of the first formally organized school for *sencha*, Kagetsuan 花月菴, was Tanaka Kakuô 田中鶴翁 (1782-1848), a wealthy sake merchant of Osaka. Kakuô learned to prepare *sencha* from the Ôbaku monk Monchû Jôfuku 聞中淨復 (1739-1829), a direct disciple of Baisaô, but was the first to establish and record set procedures for *sencha* based on *chanoyu*.¹⁸ Aspiring to bunjin ideals, Kakuô's vision of *fûryû* is included in the book, *Naniwa fûryû hanjôki* 浪華風流繁昌記 (Records of the Elegant Pleasures of Life in Osaka) of ca. 1835. Accompanying an illustration of him by the Osaka Nanga painter Yasui Bokuzan 安井卜山 (active early nineteenth century) (plate 8), are comments that to Kakuo, *fûryû*



¹⁸ His methods were recorded in an unpublished, handwritten manuscript, *Seifûryû hôcha shoshiki shôkai* 清風流煮茶諸式詳解 (A Detailed Explanation of the Elegant Commodity of Boiled Tea), written in the Tenpô era (1830-44) which survives today in three later handwritten (Meiji period) copies.

Plate 8. Yasui Bokuzan (active early 19th century), *Tanaka Kakuô at Home*, page from the woodblock book, *Naniwa fûryû hanjôki* (Records of the Elegant Pleasures of Life in Osaka), Tenpô era (1830-44). Kansai University Library, Osaka

meant sitting quietly at home, brewing *sencha* by the light of the moon, hoping to attain the loftiness of Lu Yu. To fully achieve this goal, Kakuô once sought to brew *sencha* with water obtained from China's West Lake. Yet when he finally received several precious bottles, he remonstrated himself for selfishness and together with his friends, ceremoniously dumped the water into Osaka's Yodo River (in a pot specially designed by his friend Mokubei), thus sharing a bit of China with all Osaka's inhabitants. Kakuô's exploits were so famous that he was invited to prepare *sencha* for the shogun, daimyo, and Kyoto's courtiers.¹⁹

Shogunal and daimyo interest in *sencha* differed from that of those disenfranchised with the political status quo. They enjoyed it as a private pastime, expressive of their cultivation of Chinese learning. The oldest extant *sencha* tea room in existence, the Sankatei 三華亭 (Pavilion of Three Flowers), was designed around 1850 for the Maeda Nariyasu 前田齊泰 (1811-84), the thirteenth daimyo of the clan, for his Edo residence. Its appearance is typical of the exotic Chinese atmosphere of *sencha* tea rooms: with a gourd-shaped window, shelves for *bunbôgu* 文房具, glass windows, hardstone doorpulls, a black lacquer screen used as a *fusuma*, and a narwhal's horn inset in a transom.²⁰

Another early *sencha* school, Ogawa, catered to Kyoto's courtiers. Founded in the 1830s by Ogawa Kashin 小川可進 (1786-1855), a samurai-physician, Kashin wrote in his treatise, the *Kôrakudô kissaben* 後樂堂喫茶辨 (*Kôrakudô's Talks on Tea Drinking*) of 1857, that *sencha* preparation needed to harmonize with laws of universe that were governed by Yin and Yang, the five elements, four directions, and the cycles of the seasons. This philosophy appealed to courtiers as it invoked Heian court liturgies. They also enjoyed it as a pastime contrary to the mandated bakufu etiquette of *chanoyu*. The popularity of these *sencha* schools was so great that by 1849, another bunjin writer, the Nagoya Confucian scholar Fukada Seiichi 深田精一 (1802-1855), lamented in his 1849 book *Bokusekikyô sencha ketsu* 木石居煎茶訣 (*Chats on Sencha by Bokusekikyô*), that the ascendancy of *bunjincha* was over and few kept its spirit alive. Dominating *sencha*, he said, were schools of *zokujincha* 俗人茶 ("vulgar people's tea"), like Ogawa, which were degenerate and lacking in loftiness.

Nevertheless, *bunjincha* continued to exert influence into the modern era. One of its last leaders was the Nanga painter Tanomura Chokunyû 田能村直入 (1814-1907), a friend of many Meiji statesmen. Chokunyû hosted and documented public *sencha* gatherings in the 1870s, in an effort to foster appreciation of high culture in the spirit of

¹⁹ Biographical information on Kakuô comes primarily from Tanaka Seihan 田中青坂, *Sencha Kagetsuan* 煎茶花月菴 (*Kagetsuan School Sencha*) (Tokyo: Shufu no tomo sha, 1973), pp. 315-21.

²⁰ For a study of *sencha* architecture which includes several illustrations of this structure, see Patricia J. Graham, "On the Development of an Architectural Setting for the *Sencha* Tea Ceremony," *Orientalia* (September 1991), pp. 65-75.

bunmei kaika 文明開化 (civilization and enlightenment). These should be regarded as among the first public exhibitions of art in Japan, and included rooms for display of Chinese paintings and calligraphies, decorative arts, flower and *bonsai* 盆栽 arrangements, in addition to *sencha* environments. One of these that Chokunyū helped organize took place in northern Kyushu in 1874, and was attended by no less than 800 people, including local officials.²¹ The 1875 book, *Seiwan meien zushi* 清灣茗齋圖誌 (Pictorial Record of Famous [Chinese] Utensils Used at the Azure Sea Society *Sencha* Gathering) (plate 9), commemorated another *sencha* gathering that took place in Osaka in which Chinese utensils were used exclusively. This publication was authored by an Osaka art dealer and illustrated by Chokunyū.

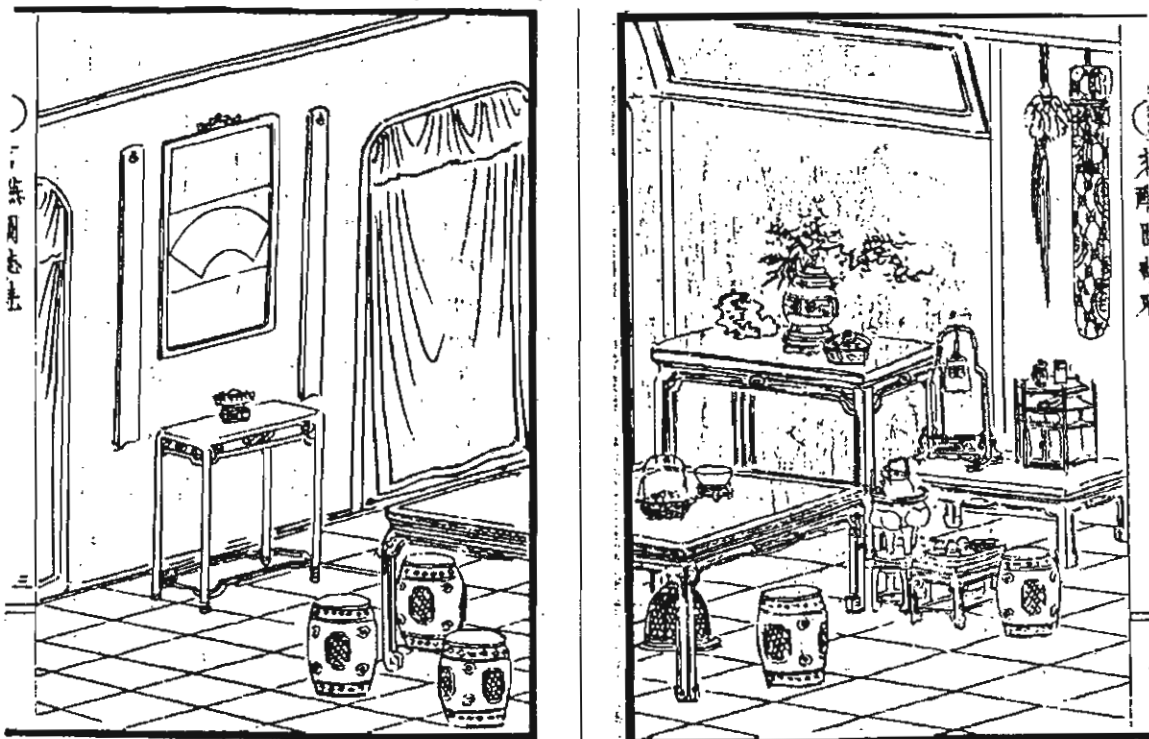


Plate 9. Tanomura Chokunyū (1814-1907), *Interior View of a Room (seki 席) for Serving Sencha*, a page from the woodblock printed book, *Seiwan meien zushi* (Pictorial Record of Famous [Chinese] Utensils Used at the Azure Sea Tea Gathering), 1875. Private collection, USA

Sencha arts and aesthetics reflect Chinese literati ideals filtered through the lenses of their Japanese practitioners' viewpoints and experiences. *Sencha's* widespread acceptance represents a startling expansion from its beginnings as a quiet and private avocation of unorthodox individuals seeking to recreate the spirit of ancient Chinese sages. The embracing of *sencha* by followers from different backgrounds and holding a wide range of often conflicting ideologies reveals the subtle process of transforming imported ideas and their deep assimilation into Japan's cultural core.

²¹ A long set of three handscrolls documenting this event is now owned by the Saint Louis Museum of Art.